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SANJOY KUMAR HAZARIKA
edbapdrn18@gmail.com

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Public Library as Community Information Service Provider: A study in North East India

Sanjoy Kr Hazarika

Research Scholar, Deptt. of Library and Information Science

Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam

E-mail: atskhdrn@gmail.com

M-9435204040

Abstract

Public libraries are the good vehicles for dissemination of information to the mass people. It is instrumental for social change. The primary goal of a public library is to serve the community for its well-being with optimum services. Due to the services for community development the public library is rightly termed as Arsenal of Democracy. This paper presents a theoretical picture of the role of Public library as Community Information Service Provider. It also discusses the role of public libraries in overcoming the Digital divide among the rural masses.

Keywords: *Arsenal of democracy, community information service, digital divide, public library*

1. Introduction:

The subject experts describe Information as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter. In fact, in view of the vital role played by information in daily life, it should be considered as the first need in terms of survival. This is because it is information about the availability of food, which food to be eaten, how to build a shelter, protection of territory, ensuring security and success, etc., which are primarily of organic importance. Without this information, it is difficult to go through the challenging process of life i.e. development. The development is a greater challenge to the third world or developing countries and this challenge is much more serious in view of the constraints on their information resources. That is, the economic development of a country depends on soundness of the information system of its economy. Allan Bunch (1982) who had first attempted to synthesis the definition of Community Information (CI), states that CI has two aspects: "one is concerned with the nature of the information provided, that is, information in the community to help people with daily problem solving or in raising the quality of their lives; the other is concerned with the nature of the clientele served, namely, those who belong to the lower socio-economic groups or are disadvantaged through an inability to obtain, understand, or act on information that affects their lives."

Community Information (CI) is a combination of two terms, i.e., Community and Information. The term "Information" is used to identify many concepts; hence, it is extremely difficult to define it precisely. Normally, information is a message, communicated by a communicator to a receiver. Giggey (1988) defines community as "a group of people who have something common. This can be their age, education, religion, interest, political affiliation, activities, work, possession or a combination of two or more of these". CI is information for the survival and growth of the community, or information required by the

members of the community to make effective use of the available resources around them. The information service through which CI is provided to communities is called Community Information Service (CIS). It may be worthwhile to look at two definitions of this concept in order to understand the focus and scope of CIS. The first use of the expression Community Information Services (CIS) was in the United States where it was coined to describe the services set up in response to the Kahn report on British Citizens Advice Bureaux (Kahn, 1966). Donhue (1976) described CIS as offering: 1. Survival information, such as that related to health, housing, income, legal protection, economic opportunity, and political rights. 2. Citizen action information, needed for effective participation as individuals or as members of a group in the social, political, legal, economic process.

2. Objectives of the study:

- (i) To study the public library services in North East India;
- (ii) To study the Community Information Services to be provided through public libraries;
- (iii) To study the prospect of Integration of other agency providing Community information service in North East India.

3. Literature review:

“No library which aims to provide an effective service can afford to neglect research into the needs of its users, both actual and potential. Some of these needs will be clearly expressed by the existing clientele, and others will be latent, and the whole areas of need may be unarticulated through ignorance of the current services offered or the potential for future development” (Brown, 1979).

One of the most difficult (but necessary) activities in the provision of community information is the assessment of information need. This must be done regularly, if established resources centres and those to be developed are to continue to be relevant in any given community (Kaniki, 1994).

Ministry of Information Technology, Government of India in collaboration with national Informatics Centre (NIC) has established Community Information Centre (CIC) in all North Eastern states and Jammu & Kashmir. Under this programme, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, Sikkim and Jammu & Kashmir have been covered. In Assam 29 District Headquarter and 219 Blocks have been covered where CIC have been established. It has been established to bridge the gap between have and have not state. Since these states have been located in remote areas, such communication facilities where a farmer may search their desired information pertaining to agriculture, industry, market rates over the Internet with the help of CIC staff and at the same time or students may do courses under distance education programme and search job online. There are so many benefits of the CIC where people may explore lot of information as per their requirement. In each community information centre, broadband Internet connectivity has been provided to access required information. Web Site has been categorised into Health education, Photography, Newsroom, Best practices and Block Community portal (<http://www.cic.nic.in/>).

The institution of ‘Library’ must have been established as a support system for ‘self-learning’. Professor Yash Pal, a scientist of great repute and former Chairman of the University Grants Commission, attaches so much importance to ‘self-learning’ that it is suggested to ‘abolish examinations and degrees from the education system’ (Pal, 2007).

4. Methodology:

The study is carried out with a theoretical approach. The study mainly aims at the prospects of Community Information Service (CIS) through public library. The data and information used in the study is secondary in nature.

5. Conceptual understanding:

5.1 Public library:

“Freedom, Prosperity and the Development of society and individuals are fundamental human values”. They will only be attained through the ability of well-informed citizens to exercise their democratic rights and to play an active role in society. Constructive participation and the development of democracy depend on satisfactory education as well as on free and unlimited access to knowledge, thought, culture and information. The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups (www.unesco.org/webworld).” This Manifesto proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women. UNESCO therefore encourages national and local governments to support and actively engage in the development of public libraries.

The Public Library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The services of the public library are provided on the basis of equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status. Specific services and materials must be provided for those who cannot, for whatever reason, use the regular services and materials, for example linguistic minorities, people with disabilities or people in hospital or prison. All age groups must find material relevant to their needs. Collections and services have to include all types of appropriate media and modern technologies as well as traditional materials. High quality and relevance to local needs and conditions are fundamental. Material must reflect current trends and the evolution of society, as well as the memory of human endeavour and imagination. Collections and services should not be subject to any form of ideological, political or religious censorship, nor commercial pressure. “Public library must offer to adults and children the opportunity to keep in touch with their times, to educate themselves continuously and to keep abreast of progress in sciences and arts.” (UNESCO, 1972)

Since independence, the public libraries system has developed for providing a reasonably meaningful library services to the people of India. During last thirty years, it is seen that public libraries are moving up in performance. Public library is that type of library where every citizen of a society can take part in all the activities. Initially the public libraries were set up by the public itself but later the Govt. allot fund for its development etc. After Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation (RRRLF) in 1972 the Public Library System in India has been developed in a systematic way. On the other hand after enacting Library Legislation in several states the library service also made well planned in those states along with the other parts of the country. The public library service in NE states is also developed. In the NE states the public library system is comprised of several types of libraries.

A total of 1545 Public Libraries are in the eight states of NE India under Government.

Table: 1
Public Libraries (PLs) in NE states

States Types of Library	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Sikkim	Tripura
State Central Library	01	-	01	01	01	01	01	01
Reference Library	-	01	-	-	-	-	-	-
Branch Library	02	03	--	-	-	-	-	-
District Library	21	26	10	07	05	08	03	07
Divisional Library	03	-	-	--	-	-	-	-
Sub- divisional Library	16	13		-	-	-	05	08
Block Library	30	-	-	-	-	-	-	06
Circle Library	38	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Town Library	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	01
Rural Library	-	200	44	-	459	618	-	02
Aided Library	-	-	-	-	-	-	02	-
Total	111	243	55	08	465	627	11	25

5.2 Public library as Arsenal of Democracy:

During the Second World War (1939–1945), ‘Arsenal of Democracy’ was the slogan used by U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in a radio broadcast delivered on 29 December 1940. Roosevelt promised to help the United Kingdom fight Nazi Germany by giving them military supplies while the United States stayed out of the actual fighting. The president announced that intent a year before the Attack on Pearl Harbour (7 December 1941), at a time when Germany had occupied much of Europe and threatened Britain.

Similarly, the public libraries can take a vital role on bringing a drastic social change. It is a store house of powerful weapons with knowledge for community information service to eliminate the shortcomings of the society. It can help the society to develop democratic values and different aspects of democracy. So it can be termed as ‘Arsenal of Democracy’.

5.3 Digital divide:

The rapid development of digital technologies has radically transformed ways of keeping in touch with home cultures and diaspora networks. In each stage of technological development, particularly within communication technology, there is a grander impact upon

cultural relationships that spreads across multiple disciplines- social, economic and political. Within this relationship between these cultural characteristics it is often hard to establish the sequence of their occurrence, or if they indeed occur simultaneously. When considering this, the Andy Warhol quote “the perennial (cultural) question: Does art imitate life, or does life imitate art?” has much relevance to the temporal relationship to the technology coming first, or if the cultural need or desire is present to inform the development of this technology. The same could certainly be said about the impact that this type of technological development relationship has politically and ultimately culturally. This poses the question, does the communication technology come first, or does a change in the political state occur to instigate the transformation of these communication technologies and their techniques? But there is a big question of digital divide.

In India it is going to be Digital. But at present the digital literacy rate in India is only 15 percent. In the next three years, the government aims to take digital literacy to at least 50 percent from the current level of 15 percent, Communications and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad opined recently. At an event to award the winners of the Digital India Week's online quiz competition on cyber safety and cyber awareness, Prasad said 100 percent digital literacy was needed to make India a truly digitalised society. He said the world was keenly watching the developments in India and it was the responsibility of the youth to come up to expectations. He said more than 4,000 innovators have come to India to explore possibilities in the fields of IT and electronic manufacturing. Prasad said the knowledge economy will prove to be the driver of change, and initiatives of the government in this direction would place the country in a certain advantageous position.

For better performance of public library in this present age of digitization the idea of Integration is must. In India there is a better social centre called Common Service Centre. Under the ministry of Information Technology the centres across the country are doing a better job. For handling the current issue of digital divide it is better think to integrate the Public Library System with the Common Service Centres. With the integration of this two government agencies we can obviously increase the percentage of digital literacy in India and in return which will lead the dream of ‘Digital India’. After integration the digital literacy programme will be taken easily. With this approach the ‘digital divide will be minimised and can be ahead for a meaningful ‘Digital India’.

6. Community Information Service (CIS):

6.1 Definition:

According to Oxford Dictionary a Community is a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. The common may include the race, language, religion, sex, age, profession etc.

According to Allen Bunch, CIS has the following two aspects; first is concerned with the nature of the information provided, that is, information in the community to help people with daily problem solving or in raising the quality of their lives; the other is concerned with the nature of the clientele served, namely those who belong to the lower socio-economic groups or are disadvantaged through an inability to obtain, understand, or act on information that effects their lives (Bunch, A Allen, 1982).

Community Information (CI) Community information is the combination of two terms i.e. “Community” and “Information”. It is such type of information needed by the members of the community for effective use of available resources to solve their day-to-day problems.

According to Susan Fleetwood “Community Information is considered to be that information required by members of the public (or these acting on their behalf) to make

effective use of the resources potentially available to them in the communities in which they live. Such information may be needed to help solve problems in the fields of housing, disability, household finance, marriage, employment and so on”.

According to Library Association, “Community Information Services are those, which assist individual and groups with daily problem solving and with participation in the democratic process. The services concentrate on the needs of those who do not have ready access to other sources of assistance on the most important problems that people have to face, problems to do with their homes, their jobs and their rights.” (Library Association,1980).

6.2 Types of Information Support:

The following types of information support to be given for community development:

1. Community information services;
2. Development of as area profile;
3. Involvement in community planning process;
4. Support to the preservation of indigenous knowledge and cultural practices;
5. Marketing and promotion of information literacy programmes;
6. Services to distance learners;
7. Information support to community self-help; and
8. Collaboration and partnership with local Government and Nongovernment agencies.

6.3 Programmes of Community Information Service:

The following programmes can be taken to provide CIS:

- Public relation
- Information literacy and its marketing
- Distance education
- User education
 - Preparation of information file
 - Preparation of computerized data base
 - Internet and World Wide Web
 - Preparation of Area profile
 - Identification of the needs of community
 - Networking among Community information centres
 - Collection and preservation of indigenous knowledge
 - Computer awareness programmes and training about Internet

6.4 Types of Community Information Services:

The following types of CIS can be given from public library:

- Information regarding livelihood
- Health information
- Drinking water
- Transport
- Emergency services
- Education
- Government information and publications
- Self-help programmes
- Rights and duties
- Consumer information
- Environment pollution
- Employment
- Travelling

- Recreation
- Internet services
- Social programmes of different NGOs
- Blood donation and health camp
- Legal aids

6.5 Problems to provide CIS for Public Library:

The following are the some basic problems for public library to provide CIS:

- Planning and infrastructure
- Staff
- Leadership
- Collection of information
- Preparation of Area Profile
- Fund
- Attitude of authority and librarian of public libraries

7. Public Library as CIS provider:

Public libraries are the good instruments for social service. At present Public Library has been taking full advantage of modern day technologies in procuring storing, organizing and dissemination all kinds of information required by the people it serves. As the situation prevails today it has come imperative for each and every public library especially in the rural and suburban areas to establish and mention spontaneous cooperation with other information providing agencies in the society to cater the information needs of community through its Community Information Service Programmes.

Public Libraries can provide Community Information Services either directly or in association with other information giving agencies. Public libraries can offer direct community information services to the people through its outreach activities or programmes in addition to its original library service with the aims of discovering the true needs of the community and by reaching the disadvantaged with required information. Now-a-days corporate sectors in the form of “Corporate Social Responsibility” programme are also providing information services reflecting their commitment to the society.

8. Integration:

For effective CIS by the public libraries the integration of the library services with the CIS of Common Service Centres (CSCs) can be made. The Government of India launched the CSC Scheme in 2006 as a part of its initiative under the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). Through the CSC scheme, the government has committed itself to addressing the divide, since it believed that e-governance would improve the standards of living of those on the wrong side of the divide and those residing in the rural areas, and allow them access to economic opportunities available to their urban counterparts. (www.csc.co.in)

A CSC in a village is completely operated by the Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE) and monitored by the Regional Control Centre (RCC) and Central Control Centre (CCC). The funds for these arrangements are managed by Sahaj (Sahaj e-village Limited, an ISO 27001:2013 certified Company entrusted for flagship of NeGP of the Government of India).

The CSCs are providing several CIS services through its centres. So, the public libraries can think of the integration of its services with the CIS of these centres.

9. Conclusion:

Due to rapid developments in the field of information service access of information is now an easy task for any simple e-literate person. But inspite of technological development human being must read books and go to library for knowledge gathering though the process of gathering information may be changed from the earlier version. For the all-round development of a community the public library of that community may be a good vehicle to provide the services that the community is hankering after. For this the public library can integrate its services with the like-minded organisations or agencies for an effective CIS package.

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